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ABSTRACT

Success in the study of literature depends on the student's ability to establish connections between word and object, between words and phrases, and between memorable experiences in all fields of learning and the reading of literature, which is interdisciplinary by nature. In understanding a literary work, a reader must make affective memory associations for good comprehension and enjoyment. The literature teacher must find ways to help students establish their own hierarchies of knowledge, making the necessary connections and association for reading success. Four procedures comprise the method of training students in effective silent reading: phrasing and antiverbalization, speed training and recall, pacers and focus of attention, and recap and recall (patterns of meaning). (A series of developmental exercises is included.) (DF)

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READING CONNECTIONS

Richard A. DeGuise

Notice the time:_____

I. Rationale

A more successful person in our society is the person with "connection." Connections that consist of (1) family ties, (2) acquaintances with members of friendly groups, (3) educational experiences, and (4) a repertory of skills are all useful, if not necessary guarantees of success in the competitive world of today. In like manner, success in the study of literature is predicated upon the ability of the student to learn to establish similar connections and use them in reading literature.

Our "family" connections consist of the English-reading peoples of the world who must master a sizeable proportion if the English vocabulary used in the production of books. This printed word "book" in its graphic form doesn't look like a book, feel like a book, sound like, smell like, nor taste like a book; but members of our family have agreed that it symbolizes book. Although individual books are as unlike one another as flowers are in size, shape, color, and special significance to people, the English reading family recognizes a quality of "bookness" extant in each.

Despite the common quality of all symbol words agreed to by English readers, these symbols cannot be very useful if we perceive then in isolation sue to the confusing images generated by the differences cited above. Words must be grouped together in phrases in order for them to convey specific meaning patterns to readers. Readers must learn to acquainted with and facile in recognising and using meaningful printed phrases.

Since each variant discipline of learning has its own common stock of meaningful English phrases, since literature draws its vocabulary from all fields of pedagogy, and since we should be the sum total of our learning experiences and perhaps a greater whole than the sum of our total experiences because of their variety; we recognize that all reading of literature is interdisciplinary in nature and should be approached by students and teachers from that point of view. The more memorable experiences we have in any and all fields of learning, the more we can bring to the task of reading literature with success.

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Different skills are necessary for different reading tasks. We don't saw a board with a hammer, nor do we drive a nail with a power saw. Most students who can read at all know only one way to read--verbalizing aloud to themselves. These verbalizers read a phone book, a Sears Roebuck catalog, a problem in applied physics, and a copy of Moby Dick--all in exactly the same manner.

Moby Dick, like most literature studied, has a narrative core. A reader must be able to visualize people and their relationships to each other, places and their geographical and historical malaise, and things and their specific forms and functional applications--all affective-memory associations which must be made for good comprehension and enjoyment. Reading may be defined as "thinking with the printed phrase." People, places, and things do not exist separately in a vacuum. "Connections" in the mind and memory must be established by the reader in order to engender a personal hierarchy of learning with the printed material. (Let us not consider plays and poetry here in this discussion.)

What is learning? How do we learn? We accumulate and store in our memory grids various blocks of information and data, emotional attachments, judgements on all kinds of contacts had, basic insights from sensory stimula, etc.--the products of a lifetime of intellectual and physical experience. Our consciousness (logos) perceives these blocks as in a street of infinity strewn with ruble and debris after the flood of living. How do we continuously select the usable blocks from which to construct and then to remodel and improve on a life set?

We associate blocks that are compatible, useful and mortar with them pedagogical systems. The construction needs we have dictate the systems used. Interdisciplinary studies and literary studies provide us with the blocks from which to choose, but we must consciously associate and connect them in a personally viable hierarchical entity.

The "Compleat Literature Teacher" must find ways to help students establish their hierarchy of knowledge. If our metaphors hold, it behooves each literature teacher to be a teacher of efficient reading practices to help students learn to make the connections and associations necessary for success in reading and thereby success in living.

II. Process

One method of training students in the efficient silent reading (Exclude all plays and poetry for the moment as they have special and different problems.) necessary in the study of narrative material may be divided into four procedures:

A. Phrasing and anti-verbalization
B. Speed training and repetitions
C. Pacers and focus of attention
D. Recap and recall, patterns of meaning

Total time required is four to six weeks. Give a pre-test, get a (1) speed and (2) comprehension measure, and be sure that all students can read a little to begin with--not more than two years below grade level. This is not a remedial program!

Some items to consider in teacher lessons:

PRESENT EACH STEP (A,B,C,D) AFTER A TIME LAPSE OF THREE DAYS, REVIEWING ALL EACH TIME.

A. 1. When we first learned to read, we were shown a picture of a cow (horse, dog, etc.) by the teacher, and we were taught to say, "Cow." Then the letters COW were shown with the picture, and we responded similarly even though we knew perfectly well that COW didn't look at all like the picture. After we could correctly identify verbally the pictures, we were given a story book and told to read quietly. We went underground and read aloud to ourselves. We are still doing it--verbalization!

2. By saying each word aloud to ourselves as we proceed, we are limiting ourselves to a talking speed of about 200 words per minute, whereas our minds are capable of working at the speed of up to 60,000 words per minute.

3. We cannot / say more than / one word / at a time, / so if / we divide / the words / into phrases / and fix / our eyes / on a phrase / at a time, / we cannot say / the words / as we move / from phrase / to phrase. (Marks indicate early phrase divisions)

4. Unlearning old habits / of word by word / verbalization in reading / is difficult. / Concentrate on eye movements / from phrase to phrase. / We are not reading; / we are practicing / eye movements only-- / smooth, rhythmic movements / from phrase to phrase. / Break down / the old habits / of moving the eyes. (Marks indicate a later, more sophisticated phrasing)

5. Our eyes work like little cameras--we only see during stops or fixations and not while eyes are moving. Concentrate on stoping the eyes on the optical center of each phrase only.

B. 1. Move the eyes as quickly as possible from phrase to phrase--so fast that one doesn't have time to verbalize.

2. Develop a smooth left to right rhythmic bounce if the eyes from the middle of the next.

3. See all, say nothing. Repeat scenes as many times as needed.

4. Drill for speed. Mark off three or four minutes if timed phrading. Go over the same material three more times. Cut down the time allowed by 30 seconds each time and still try to cover the same material each time. Drill 20-30 minutes each day on some aspect of practice.

5. Use a practice novel (with a multitude of short scenes in a stream of consciousness style) of a little more difficulty than the pre-test showed students could handle easily. Readers Digest Condensed Books work well. Present background information on the author, the historical scene, and techniques of writing used in the genre. Anticipate the reading with as many unanswered questions as possible. Check (with a formula) the reading level of the practice novel. (Interest level, also) For high school seniors, Cats Cradle by Kurt Vonnegut is recommended.

C. 1. Use a pacer, preferably the hand to underscore each line as we move down the page. The hand (not the finger) is better than a card or pacing machine because it develops hand-eye coordination as well as focuses attention. Lack of attention is deadly.

2. Always repeat rather than slow down!

3. Pull the eyes along with the hand-pacer.

4. Force the mind to break the old habits of listening to a word at a time recitation.

5. Concentrate on focusing attention.

IT IS NOW TIME TO START THE ACTUAL READING OF THE MATERIAL FOR MEANING.

D. 1. Work a scene at a time at one practice sitting.

2. Try one scene each day (to begin with) for 20-30 minutes practice time. This will allow teachers time to support the reading with missed information and time to do other things concurrently. The effects of daily practice must be evaluated in order to move from step to step more efficiently.

3. After seeing all the phrases, stop and try to recall seeing names and identities of people, activities in which they are involved, objects or props used to further the narritive or establish the different characters. Of major inmportance is to recap what students saw themselves see and not what they heard themselves say.

4. Continually ask questions when recapping. Repeat each scene (at hgihest speed possible for each one) until questions are answered. Learn to "anticipate" as much as possible.

5. Always make conscious comparison and connections with material covered in this practice book and all other narritives that can be dredged from memory.

6. Notice the incongruities and inconsistences encountered as signposts of literary symbols inroduced and condensed images which make the reading so much more rich.

7. Learn to read ideas and not words.

8. Associate immediate gains in knowledge with previous learning by putting gains in a memorable pattern on which to "hang" things.

Work for enthusiasm in practice. Continually point out the many advantages in efficient reading of narrative material: Time saved for toehr things, more understanding--hence greater success in studies, the "opening-up" of our vast literary heritage, the positive high correlation between reading skill and success in higher education, the monetary advantage in the business world, the opportunity to put together and synthesize bits of knowledge gained in all disciplines, etc.

Give the post-test and compute the (1) speed and (2) comprehension scores for all students. The minimum reading improvement in reading narrative materials that a teacher can expect is double the previous reading speed with equal or better comprehension. Many students will exceed their beginning speed by three or four times and improve their comprehension skills as well.

III. Evaluation

Notice the time it took to read this material: _____ wpm / 1400

If the reading took more than five minutes reading time, there is a problem with excessive verbalization, repetitious eye movements, lack of attention, etc. which should be remedied.

Please answer the questions which follow and allow 5% for each correct answer in order to get an estimate of the level of comprehension (even though not on narrative material) at the speed at which read. The key will be furnished upon request.

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Test on Rationale and Process for efficient silent reading narratives:

Circle the best answer given for each:

1. The most serious cause of slowness in reading is A. tired blood B. Verbalization C. small print D. poor eyes

2. The cause of poor understanding in reading is A. fixing on words one at a time B. slowness C. not paying attention D. all of these

3. A reader's eyes work like little A. telescopes B. microscopes C. cameras D. forehead projectors

4. The mind is capable of handling up to A. 200 words per minute B. 500 wpm C. 2,000 wpm D. 60,000 wpm

5. "See all, say _____" is good practice for efficient reading. A. nothing B. everything C. all names of things only D. middle words only in phrases

6. There are A. two B. three C. four D. any number words in a phrase

7. A fixation should be made A. at the beginning of a phrase B. middle of a phrase C. end of a phrase D. under a phrase

8. Step one in silent reading practice is to develop the rhythm of moving a reader's eyes from A. phrase to phrase B. word to word C. line to line D. page to page

9. A pacer is useful to A. focus attention B. pull the eyes along C. develop hand-eye coordination D. all of these

10. The best pacer to use is A. your hand B. your finger C. a 3 X 5 card D. a tachistoscope

11. Reading practice should be done by A. chapters B. chunks of 5 minutes each C. 3 minutes worth D. a scene at a time

12. In recapping try to recall A. names of people B. activities C. objects D. all of these

13. We should stop and recall-recap at the end of each A. scene B. chapter C. stanza D. paragraph

14. Instead of reading words, a silent reader should learn to read A. ideas B. facts C. statistics D. none of these

15. The number of reading practice steps emphasized were A. three B. four C. five D. six

16. Good comprehension comes from A. practicing anticipation B. making comparisons C. seeing incongruities D. all of these

17. Good speed not only saves time, but aids greatly in A. comprehension B. pacing C. recalling facts D. none of these

18. The ideal reading practice time per session is A. 20-30 minutes B. 50-60 minutes C. 70-80 minutes D. none of these

19. Reading practice should be done A. every day B. every other day C. whenever there is time to concentrate D. whenever the reader slows

20. The secret of comprehension improvement is to speed-repeat (go over same material) and recap until it is mastered instead of to A. read aloud B. slow down and be more careful C. study each word by itself D. all of these